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The Individual Roads Taken: Recent SUNY Buffalo Law Graduates Take Many Different Routes in A Tough Job Market. Six Tell Their Stories . . .

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The individual roads taken

Recent SUNY Buffalo Law graduates take many different routes in a tough job market. Six tell their stories . . .

Ross Sarraf '14

Associate, Fried Frank Harris Shriver & Jacobson, New York City

"When I came to the Law School, I had a sense that what I wanted to do was work in a larger firm," says Ross Sarraf, a J.D./MBA graduate. And so for him, the work of job-hunting began pretty much right away.



"I spent the first year trying to talk to the people who worked at larger firms, to get a sense of what I needed to do," he says. "They talked about positioning yourself academically, getting on *Law Review*, doing the extracurricular things that firms like.

"Then I spent the majority of my time getting hold of SUNY Buffalo alumni in Western New York and New York City. I started out by talking to Marc Davies [of the Career Services Office]. He had a good sense of which lawyers actually were helpful to students, those who were really responsive and interested in helping. He helped me whittle down the list to a group of maybe 50."

Sarraf started cold-calling those lawyers. "I would ask about the recruiting process, say that I was planning to apply to your firm, and anything you can tell me about working at the firm would be appreciated. Lots of people were very helpful, including some who said, 'I've tried but we really only hire Ivy League graduates, and you

Shatorah Roberson '12

Partner, Budde & Roberson, Buffalo

It wasn't a direct route, Shatorah Roberson says, but it got her to a good place. At the end of her third year, she did some interviewing but found no job offers forthcoming. She decided to hold off, studied for the bar exam, then did some contract legal work and even temp work before she landed a permanent position at a small firm. But there she found that "I was just very unhappy. I didn't know what it was like to work in the private sector, and I was taken aback at how things were driven entirely by money. I wasn't sure what to do."

While in law school, Roberson had worked as a law clerk for the University's immigration counsel, processing immigrant and non-immigrant visas for the University's international professionals. As fate would have it, her supervisor in that department,



Oscar Budde, needed help in his practice, which specializes in immigration law and corporate start-up legal services. He called her.

"It was kind of like the perfect storm," Roberson says. "I wanted to do immigration and

help people, but I didn't want it to be all about money. Money doesn't get me up in the morning – my clients get me up in the morning."

Now, though "I still have days when I doubt myself and my capacity to really help people and effect changes," she says her professional life is much happier. "I get creative control but I still am accountable to someone else for the work that I do," she says. "It's a good situation."

probably should focus elsewhere."

It was through one of those Buffalo connections – Robert Schwenkel '82, co-chair of Fried Frank's corporate department – that Sarraf won a coveted intern position last summer. His MBA helped with some of the concepts and terminology in the M&A and private equity deals he worked on, and the week before the internship was over, the hiring partner tendered him a job offer.

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Rody Damis '13

Presidential Management Fellow, Department of Veterans Affairs, Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

"For me," says Rody Damis, a J.D./MBA graduate of the Law School, the job search "was a process. I went about it as if I was the only person who could find myself a job – not the networks, not the school. I had to make sure I had the right networks and was doing the right things. Anything that attorneys told me would make me more marketable, I would do it."

And he did the legwork. "I



made sure to apply for every single program, no matter how difficult it seemed to be,"

Damis says. That included the Presidential Management Fellowships, the federal government's program to train and develop its next generation of leaders. After Damis got an email from the Career Services Office about the program, he researched it and applied – a process that included three essays, a video assessment

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Rody Damis '13

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and an application, then a day-long in-person assessment that included a group exercise, a mock news conference and personal interviews. Twelve thousand people applied; 300, including Damis, were chosen.

The program rotates fellows through various federal agencies. Damis currently is at the VA medical center in eastern Pennsylvania, drafting and negotiating contracts with vendors to, he says, "make sure the government gets what it paid for."

"I'm not sure where I'll end up after my two years are done," he says. "I love working for the government. But they're really up on leadership development, and the fellowship itself also makes you pretty marketable."

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Matthew Turetsky '14

*Assistant public defender,
Ontario County (N.Y.) Public
Defender's Office*

Even before he entered law school, Matt Turetsky had worked in the public defender's office near his hometown of Clifton



Springs, N.Y., as an intern. "I really liked it," he says. "I liked the office and I liked the people. And I knew I wanted to do some type of litigation – that's what my skills gravitated toward."

So he returned to the same office in his 1L summer, then his 2L summer. But timing is everything, and when he graduated, they didn't have a position open for him. So he widened his search.

"I applied for countless jobs," Turetsky says. "But it's hard,

Raad Ahmed '13

Founder and CEO, LawTrades.com, New York City



As law school began, Raad Ahmed fully expected to follow the traditional path: work hard, get good grades, find a job in a law firm. But two things conspired to change his mind.

The first was the success of an app he created that, he says, "makes your Facebook page look awesome." "That got me more excited about going the entrepreneurial route," he says.

The second was that, in all his reading about starting your own law practice, he realized how hard it is to find clients and build a practice. "I started wondering why it isn't easier for people to find legal help," he says. "Access to legal services is a huge issue."

So he created a system that made it possible to book an appointment with a lawyer online. He sought feedback from other students, entrepreneurs and lawyers, and developed his company, Lawtrades.com, starting with a handful of attorneys in New York City. The company now has four employees and works with over 300 lawyers in 40 cities, providing potential clients, Ahmed says, "a portal for finding interested and available lawyers who can take your case, in a quick and seamless process."

He acknowledges that plunging into the uncertain world of entrepreneurship was a risk, especially for someone carrying student loan debt. But, he says, "I really wanted to be the first in the market for something like this. I took a chance, and luckily it's working out for me right now."

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because there are some jobs posted, but you're trying to find something that works well for you. I wanted to find a position that I really wanted to do."

So, he says, he bided his time. And he stayed in touch with the folks at the public defender's office: "I talked to them a lot. We went back and forth a couple of times. I waited for this position. And the timing worked out just

enough – somebody left, and I was offered the job.

"The reason I kept going back," he says, "is that I like criminal law. I think it's interesting. But the experience I'm going to gain there, that's what I'm really interested in."

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Kimberly Rowles '13

*Law clerk to Hon. Elizabeth A. Wolford, U.S. District Court,
Western District of New York,
Rochester, N.Y.*

"Nothing was working out," Kimberly Rowles says of her job-hunting experience during her third year at SUNY Buffalo Law. "I was applying for jobs all along, and I went to a number of interviews, but it's still a tough climate out there."

What she really wanted to do, Rowles says, was clerk for a judge. She had had an internship with the Second Circuit court in Geneseo, and, she says, "I knew that I really enjoyed working in the federal courts."

She took a break from looking for a job – and it turned out to be a lucky break. Typically judges hire their law clerks a year out, but Judge Elizabeth Wolford was appointed to the federal bench to fill a vacancy, and she needed a clerk. "The judge was appointed at a time that wasn't on the typical schedule for a judge to be hiring clerks," Rowles says. The appointment took effect in January; Rowles applied in December, and got the job.

Now, she says, "I'm exposed to a lot of areas of law, and I'm learning a lot. I get to see practitioners at work, review their papers, see them at trial."

And she says, "I am proud that I came from Buffalo Law School. I know that I'm well prepared for what I'm doing. I'm proud of the fact that I come from a state school education and was able to get a position like this, and continue to learn and transfer my skills to the legal community when I enter practice someday."

